## PEAKS OF SHALA

133 ered hundreds of miles with every variation of light and shadow, and we looked across their tops to a far-away wave of snow that broke high against the sky. The depths between the mountains were hazy blue; out of the blueness sharp cliffs and huge flat slopes of rock thrust upward, streaked with the rose and purple and Chinese green of decomposing shale, and from their tops a thousand streams poured downward, threading them with silver white. A low, continuous murmur rose to us—the sound of innumerable waterfalls, softened by immeasurable distances.

202 Suddenly, clear and very far and thin, a call came out of the spaces.[1] It was like a fife, and yet not like it. Instantly our guides were still, attentive. A moment of silence, and farther and thinner, hardly to be heard above the beating of blood in our ears, there was an answer. Then the first note began again and went on and on; there seemed to be a pattern to it, not a tune—words? I looked at the others.

Rrok Perolli was motionless, a cigarette between his lips, his hand arrested in the act of striking a match. Little Rexh, his round face intent beneath the red fez, his mouth slightly open, his eyes wide and blank, was an image of concentrated listening. The two gendarmes stood alert, like dogs straining at a leash, scenting something. Our four guides, in their long white trousers, black jackets, colored turbans and sashes, were like men frozen in attitudes of interrupted talk.

[291]

[1] In Chafa Bishkasit Mountains [8] of Albania -- Analysis

## PEAKS OF SHALA

202 The voice ceased. The other one came back like an echo, so faint I thought I imagined it. Then—Bang! Bang! Bang! The very mountains lifted up their voices and roared. It was like the cataclysm at the end of the world; mountain striking against mountain, the air smashed like glass and falling, clattering. Rrok Perolli lighted his cigarette. The others shifted their rifles, tightened their sashes, said "Hite!" to the horses, and we started on. All around us the echoes were still contending, striking and breaking against one another like ore in a mill.

"What was it?" I cried to Perolli, whose horse was slipping down the trail ahead, kept from going headlong by its owner, who held it by the tail, bracing his bare feet on every foothold.

"Telephoning," said Perolli. "It's the way they send news through the mountains. A man on one of the peaks calls, and another one somewhere hears him and answers. You've seen 'em hold their ears and throw their voices. That's it. And three shots to show that the talk's ended."

"What was he saying?"

"Something about Shala. Shala and Shoshi are in blood, evidently."

000 "Do we go through those tribes?"

My horse slipped just then and a man snatched me from the saddle. The horse, held by the tail, floundered on the trail, striking sparks from his hoofs, shod with solid thin plates of steel; the packs went over his head. My man set me on a

## PEAKS OF SHALA

000 "He is a good man, and brave," said the bishop, "and little Sokoi will be a great one."

At noon the rain was still pouring from apparently inexhaustible skies, but Cheremi, Rexh, and Perolli assumed, as a matter of course, that we would go on; the difficulty was that there [361] were no mules. There should have been a mule in the village, whose houses were scattered, miles apart, all the way down the deep-walled gorge to the banks of the River Shala, twenty-five miles away, but when Cheremi hastened lightly up a twelve-hundred-foot peak and cried to the farthest house that we wanted mules, the answer came back that there were none since the war.

So he found an aged man—seventy-five years old, he was, but still agile and bright eyed—and put our packs on his back, and at noon we started out on foot, with fresh-peeled staffs provided by Rexh, and new-baked corn bread in the saddlebags.

576 After an hour of desperate climbing we stood ● 202 on the peak from which Cheremi had telephoned. The bishop's house and the school lay dwarfed beneath our feet, and Perolli, standing on a rock and holding his ears, sent down to them a shrill hail. "Ooeeoo! Monseignor!"

The bishop appeared in his woolen gown, a rifle in his hand, and all the guns in our party went off at once, and again, and again, while fifty miles of sheer rock cliffs barked back at them. My hands were over my ears, but I saw the three answering white puffs from the bishop's

[Pultit, in Albanian [88] Mountains --Analyst]

574 rifle, and while the echoes were dying, still
202 repeating themselves down the valley, we saw him hand it to his servant and protect his eardrums with his thumbs. His call came up to us, "Go on a smooth trail!"

"Now," said Perolli, thrusting his revolver back into its holster, "we have said good-by to the bishop. *Allons!*"

∞∞ "And to-night," I said, joyously, "we'll sleep in a native house."

Frances and Perolli did not seem enthusiastic about that hope, and as we toiled up trails that were stairways of giant bowlders, or slid down slopes of pale-green shale, above valleys where the clouds swirled beneath us, the discussion continued fragmentarily.

Frances's reluctance I could ascribe to the shrieking of her muscles, which, if tortured as mine had been by the previous day's travel, must be screaming with agony at her every step. But Perolli, true Albanian in spite of his years of living in foreign capitals, was as fresh as the crisp air that blew upon us between the gusts of driving rain. He leaped up bowlders, he joined in the singing of the others, who, with sixty-pound sacks on their backs, walked easily up the incredible steeps, their thumbs at their ears, chanting songs of ancient battles with the Turks.

"Don't you think it safe to stay in a native house?" said I, remembering that he was an officer of the government traveling incognito among unfriendly tribes, and that within sight

6: Lane T-3 (no date) 1923 EGl Albania EGl

## POSTSCRIPT

It seemed to me the most remarkable tale of a political crisis that I had ever heard, and for some time I considered it in silence, getting the full delightful flavor of it. The moon and the minaret were a Japanese print against the turquoise sky, and somewhere a mandolin tinkled and a voice sang the "Mountain Song":

> "How beautiful is the month of May,
> When we go with the flocks to the mountains!"

Then a discrepancy in Rexh's story struck me. "If the Merdite is five days from Tirana, and Ahmet was fighting the Serbs there, how did he come to Tirana in three days? How did he know there was trouble in Tirana?"

"Ahmet is a Gheg, Mrs. Lane. A Gheg always expects trouble. When he went into the mountains he left behind him men he could trust, hidden in the woods by the telephone wires. There is a small round black thing that can hear on a telephone wire—I do not know what you call it. It is small, and has a wire that goes over the telephone wire; you put it to your ear. Ahmet had got some of those from Vienna, and some little mirrors, for the men he left behind him. In the morning after Pandeli resigned, word went over the telephone to Elbassan to kill the Parliament, and to some of Hassan Prishtini's men to stay on the trails to the Merdite and not let Ahmet get back to Tirana. Ahmet's men heard this, and with the little mirrors in the sunshine they telegraphed it to the

6: Lane T-3 (no date) 1923 EGl Albania EGl

## POSTSCRIPT

mountains, and other men telephoned it with their voices to Ahmet. So he came secretly around Prishtini's men, and came walking day and night to Tirana. He left his men in the Merdite to hold the Serbs, and took the twelve hundred fresh men from the Catholic part of the Mati."

"Ahmet is Mohammedan?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lane. His family has been Mohammedan since Scanderbeg died."

"In the morning I shall go to see Ahmet. He must be a remarkable man."

Rexh considered this statement. "He is a good man, yes. We have a saying in the mountains, Mrs. Lane. 'Ask a thousand men, then follow your own advice.' I think that is what Ahmet does."

I had interviewed, without exceptional enthusiasm, each member of the Albanian Cabinet save Ahmet, the Hawk, chief of the Mati. But I am not, in general, enthusiastic about the Ministers or members of Parliament that I have met in any country. In democratic countries their profession gives their minds a remarkable agility, like that of the elephant on the rolling ball. The muscular development of the elephant a-pilin' teak in the slushy mushy creek has more interest for me. This is a matter of personal taste. However, I am about to become so enthusiastic about Ahmet Bey Mati that it seems well to mention that my enthusiasms are few, and not

10: Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EGl Albania EGl



us by Father Gjeçov,[1] the last clause announces that though the Pecnikaj kin of Shalë laid down the law enunciated in clause 2, it had the support of the Lotaj, Abati (Abat) and Bobi (Bob) kins in doing so. Its first and its fourth clauses consider the adhesion of the brotherhood of Theth as well. Occasionally there was a partial meeting of a brotherhood, and at the bottom of the scale there were household meetings at which the master set some common problem before all the men in the family.

Generally speaking, assemblies of all types took place at irregular intervals, to meet some special need, though the demand that they should be called regularly once a year was not unknown.[2]

When a kin or smaller meeting was in question, the convener sent anyone he could find to call it. Bigger meetings were summoned by word of mouth by the public messenger. In Mat a gipsy beat out the summons on his drum and in Shpat church bells were rung.

Attendance at a plenary meeting was compulsory, non-attendance punishable by a fine. For instance, an elder of Kurbin who failed to turn up and could not satisfy the other elders that his absence was justified was fined five rams. An ordinary tribesman in the same area was fined one ram and in Kastrat 250 piastres. The strength and solidarity of the tribes were closely connected with the plenary character of their assemblies.

Most public meetings took place in the open air, as church houses were usually too small and schoolrooms and village halls did not exist. Meeting places had to be central and free from cultivation, rock, scrub and forest so as to provide adequate seating space In Catholic areas the yard of the church was commonly used for General Assemblies and in Moslem areas that of the mosque. Assemblies of a village or kin could be held in the most central of the smaller clearings of the area, and a house was big enough for a brotherhood or household assembly.

Some meeting-places were specially famous. At Lesh, a thriving seaport at the mouth of the river Drin, and not the malarial inland townlet into which it has been converted by the advance of the Drin towards Italy, Lek Dukagjini and Skanderbeg met by preference, as it was centrally situated for both their domains. The place of meeting was probably the grassy sward near the ruined church on the right bank of the Drin, opposite the modern town.

[1] See Appendix, Document XII, p. 272

[2] See Appendix, Document V, § 16, p. 264.

312 with the household marks of the families which are allowed to used
[493] the particular canal concerned in turn--, the screeching ox cart whose two wheels are two meters high because of the muddy roads, and which is drawn by the animals driven on by the goad and harnessed with a yoke on the nape of their necks; the wooden plow whose slade
501 and handle are both of one piece (Figure 9). The swimming bag made of a goat's skin that is blown up and tied to the front of the body, and the raft made of four such skins and a netting of intertwined osier switches, upon which the swimmer puts his clothes bundle (Figure 6). For the rest the people avail themselves of simple and double canoes, with or without side boards that raise the edge of the boat, with or without flanking beams that are nailed to the boat as floaters designed to maintain the equilibrium (Figures 7 and 8). Plank boats also occur. To husk the corn a mat of intertwined switches is placed on top of four posts rammed into the ground, and the corn cobs are then beaten with sticks one and one-half meters long, until the kernels have all fallen
411 to the ground through the plaited meshes (Figure 11). The long flint-locks, which are quite often beautiful old heirlooms, have only survived still in the south; they are being replaced by the modern repeating rifles, the pistols, and the handjars, the knife with the bone handle
221 of the shank of a cow, and the revolvers. The Albanians are to a
241 large extent farmers and in part migrating herders who commute back and forth between their winter quarters in the plains towards the Adriatic, where they work their fields, and their summer settlements on the highland pastures to which they return after they have finished working
[312] the fields. During wanderings in the highlands they rub last year's mountain snow on sheets of rock that have been scorched by the sun,
● [202] in order to get water. The extensive settlement of the mountains has given rise to the development of a good signalling system by means
183 of shooting and shouting and their transmission. Certain old customs have been preserved that bespeak a life in firmly joined group combinations. To these belong the abducting of the bride, bride purchasing, the engagment of children, sworn blood brotherhood, and revenge for
[162] murder. The Albanians are approximately seven-tenths Mohammedan,
771 two-tenths Greek Orthodox, and one-tenth Roman Catholic. Nevertheless, all kinds of remnants have been preserved attesting an earlier spiritual life of the people which practiced a clairvoyant contemplation of supernatural powers and processes, basing its knowledge and its actions on the basis of its magical connection with these mysterious
000 forces. Thus their practices and beliefs included: building sacrifices,

[see 1: Karutz, E1 Europe, cat. 116, p. 69a -- Analyst]